

Life is Better When You're Laughing

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### Abstract

This paper explores the benefits of laughing for someone's overall health and other stages of a person's life. Throughout this paper will go into detail about a few published articles that reported on the effects of laughing on both a physical and mental health perspective. MacDonald (2004) and Gibson (2004) educate on the different kinds of laughing therapy's and meditations and also give us the true meaning of "comic relief". Whereas other articles will report on the effectiveness of these types of therapies on people of all ages especially older adults. The other article explains the effects on laughing on the grieving part of a person's life and the health and physical benefits of laughing overall on the body and mind.

*Keywords:* laughing, health, body, mind, relief, grief

### Life is Better When You're Laughing

Laughter has always been a way to make someone feel better or brighten their day. But more recently it has been discovered that humor and laughter can have important impacts on health. We chose this topic because we feel that it is looked over and there are a lot of health benefits that people do not realize. While laughter is beneficial for everybody, it is especially good for older adults. It is good for them mostly because it does not take a specific talent or skill to laugh at something. Also, this type of exercise can be done anywhere, which is important for older adults if they do not have the resources to get out of their house very often. Laughter needs to become a bigger part of older adult's lives because it is so beneficial and easy to participate in.

The health benefits of laughter have been considered throughout history. According to Martin, one of the earliest notations that address the benefits of laughter was traced to a biblical reference, Proverbs 17:22: "a merry heart doeth good like a medicine" (MacDonald, 2004, p. 19). There have also been many philosophers in the 16<sup>th</sup>, 17<sup>th</sup>, and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries that have talked about the importance of laughter. According to Macdonald (2004), "humor and laughter have also been used in oncology, critical care, mental health, hospice, and health promotion" (p. 19).

There are many clinical studies that suggest laughter and humor can clinically improve "inflammatory disorders, asthma, cancer, and heart disease by reducing the physiological stress response" (MacDonald, 2004, p. 20). These studies have identified psychological effects that include stress and anxiety reduction, improvements in mood, the ability to cope, and self-esteem. (MacDonald, 2004)

Laughter programs such as humor therapy, laughter therapy, laughing meditation, and laughter clubs have become very popular. All of these programs can be used by anyone. Even though the programs are available for anybody, they all have their advantages and disadvantages. Humor therapy can be used individually or in by a group of people. It often involves using true story novels that humorously recount life events. The individuals that participate in humor therapy are encouraged to share humorous things that have taken place in their lives. This disadvantages that of humor therapy is the difficulty of finding topics that are humorous to all of the participating members. Another disadvantage is the use of jokes may be offensive to some parties or strike people as hurtful and discourage future participation. Also, the clinicians must be careful to laugh with instead of at the patients. (MacDonald, 2004)

According to MacDonald (2004), laughter therapy uses a personal humor profile, in which clients identify their laughter triggers (p. 22). It also teaches the clients certain exercises that can be used outside of the laughter therapy setting. A disadvantage of laughter therapy is the clinician must learn how to be sensitive to every client's sense of humor and what they believe is appropriate. (MacDonald, 2004) Humorous materials are not necessary in laughter meditation. Each exercise only takes about 15 minutes to complete. One of the purposes of laughter meditation is to enhance the overall coping capabilities of the clients. Some disadvantages to laughter meditation are that laughter is not spontaneous and it could potentially be awkward for some clients. (MacDonald, 2004)

It is very important especially with older adults to keep their humor, since this population may be having trouble with aging or losing a spouse for example, laughing can decrease their worries and for a split second, help them forget their sadness. Humor therapy is a program that is slowly but surely taking retirement, doctors' offices, hospice, and cancer

treatment centers by storm. One of the first signs of depression is the loss of one's sense of humor (Gibson, 2004, p. 446). With humor therapy, people get to laugh and forget some of their troubles for at least a short period of time. "Comic Relief" has been proven to show enhancements in people's health lives (Gibson, 2004, p. 446-447). It also has shown signs of preventing mental illnesses. When we chuckle and laugh out loud, we are exercising our lungs.

People sometimes would compare the health benefits to the body to when people cry, they can trigger the release of stress and toxins from the body. Some physical benefits of laughter are the increase in blood circulation, clearing bronchial secretions, and boosting of the immune system (Gibson, 2004, p. 447). Laughter triggers the release of endorphins in the brain making people feel better overall. There are a number of physiological responses that benefit from laughing; laughing helps the entire body relax, relieving muscle tension and stress. Levels of stress hormones, like cortisol, drop and minimize pain throughout the body. (Gibson, 2004, p. 446). Research studies have shown that laughing consistently shows a connection between laughing and longevity. Laughing has been proven to lower blood pressure, increasing blood flow, and an overall decreased risk of heart attacks and strokes (Gibson, 2004, p. 447).

These "Comic Relief" programs are in many health care settings and there are even conferences for health care settings and agencies. These laughter projects help people grieve and laugh some of their worries away, not permanently, but for a while. People that participate in these comic sessions are going from moping to coping to hoping. People need laughter in their lives to get away from some of their harsh realities. Laughing can give you a positive outlook on life.

A program we wish to introduce is one that is both stationary as well as mobile. The mobile unit will be mainly to benefit the elderly clientele. The importance of laughter will be acknowledged as well as highly exercised along with yoga like activities, giving it its name "laughing yoga". The advertising will be placed all over the towns and cities the company will be located in. The mobile laughing yoga unit will go to elderly adults in a variety of places like, nursing homes, hospitals, retirement communities so we could reach out to those who may not be able to commute or who don't have access to transportation. Whereas our studio will cater to people of all ages wanting to participate in the benefits of laughing yoga.

A person doesn't need to go out of their home to experience the benefits from laughing. A study done by Nursing Standard (2006) stated that "chronic life stressors such as anxiety may contribute to increased risks of coronary heart disease, in part by impairing endothelial function". After having the subject watch "funny films" the researchers evaluated the subjects they found that "the improvement after laughing has been seen following aerobic activity" (2006). Older adults will benefit from this type of exercise because of the low intensity and the lack of experience and equipment needed. Laughing can help not only your lungs but it was found that it could be a great workout for your heart also and may even contribute to lowering a person's risk for heart disease (Shahidi, 2011, p.324).

In conclusion, laughing has been proven to help with a person's health from the multiple sources discussed. Laughing has been proven to help a person's mental health by helping a person overcome mental blocks like grief. Laughter also can help your body's organs stay alert and healthy and also help prevent disease in the heart as we age (Gibson, 2004). People have looked over laughter as a form of health prevention and treatment for so many years but now

more than ever. Laughing therapies have become popular in the last 10 years and are rapidly growing. Researchers have found the one thing that is good for us and we actually love!

## References

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